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Teacher Training For School Self-Evaluation

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Abstract

Culture of evaluation among schools and self-evaluation within schools are gradually developing with the scholastic autonomy system. Considering the evaluative experiences at the level of school context (meso and/or micro levels), teachers usually become enrolled as voluntary evaluators. For that reason having motivation and being able to use appropriately evaluative both tools and language are aspects more frequently perceived relevant and required by teachers. So attending training course is felt as need by teachers for improving their evaluative capabilities. The case study regards a teacher training organized in some primary and middle schools of Genoa to improve teacher expertise to systematically evaluate student learning performances.

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1. Overview

Culture of evaluation among schools and self-evaluation within schools are gradually developing with the scholastic autonomy system. Evaluative forms within schools are different but, at the same time, complementary to do generally evaluation at micro-level, such as student assessment within classrooms, and evaluation at macro-level, such as the systematic national and international evaluative researches. The case study regards a teacher training organized in some primary and middle schools of Genoa to improve teacher expertise to evaluate students' learning performances.

The teacher training on evaluation has been required by school managers of five schools of Genoa and approved (and in part financed) by the School Board of the Liguria Province. This course has been projected and managed by the doctoral students in Evaluation of educational process and systems of the University of Genoa starting from stakeholder involvement in an analysis of needs.

The teacher training was implemented during the Scholastic Year 2009/2010 and involved one kindergarten, four primary schools and a middle school that were organized in two school networks.

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The course differs between networks for the aims: a network decided to work vertically (from the kindergarten to the middle level) on the effectiveness of the portfolio and the other one worked transversally between classrooms of the same level.

Particularly, in this paper we want to show the project articulation of the teacher training, the main results of the evaluation of the project activity, and of its implementation underling strengths and weaknesses explained by participants.

The main results shows that embedded training and practical activities of evaluation satisfy not only the micro-level needs increasing teacher expertise, but also empower organizational learning and evaluative culture within (micro level) and between (meso level) schools and between schools and public administration (macro level).

2. Theoretical Framework

During the past most of nations, such as Italy, had an unique national scholastic model that was followed by the schools. Actually, scholastic autonomy is developing.

Starting from the consideration that the scholastic autonomy gives relevance to the scholastic quality, the results of formative processes and their evaluations become relevant.

It is necessary to distinguish between two levels of school evaluation: macro and micro level. The first considers the national educative system and accounts the total public school system to orient its evolution. Micro level takes into account single schools and it is useful to monitor and to empower the educative plans, improving processes and their results (Castoldi, 2005).

Another distinction is between external, internal and self- evaluation (Bezzi, 2009)².

Particularly self-evaluation and self-assessment activities are, according to Castoldi (2001), expressions of scholastic autonomy because they guide school development, monitoring systematically scholastic results and student performance empowering, at the same time, school identity and legitimating school autonomy.

The International School Improvement Project (ISIP) done by the Organization for the Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines self-evaluation such as³:

- a systematic process, not simply a reflection;
- characterized by short-term goals consisted of valid information about scholastic conditions, functions, aims and productivity;
- where feedback are useful to answer to specific organizational and didactic questions;
- involving participants in collegial processes of team work;
- realizing an “own” scholastic process;
- improving and developing school system.

Self-evaluation is not simply a reflection but it is a systematic process that considers the embedded organizational end educative complexities. Moreover self-evaluation is considered such as one of the most appropriate procedures to account scholastic activities to different stakeholders (students, families, citizens and policy makers). As the matter of fact it focuses on how and how much the schools are able to question critically practices and processes (Berger *et al.*, 2003), giving valid information about school conditions, functions, aims and productivity in short-time.

Self-evaluation is also effective for solving specific organizational or curricular questions such as learning, teaching and scholastic management. The improvement of not only single schools but also of the total educational system is a consequence of self-evaluation processes.

² External school evaluation is done by external individuals who manage the evaluation so that there is objectivity and critical thinking. It is done by evaluators independent from the proponent. Internal evaluation is done by an evaluation team of the responsible administration of the evaluated program. It differs from self-evaluation, which is done by the individuals of the evaluated organization (Bezzi, 2009).

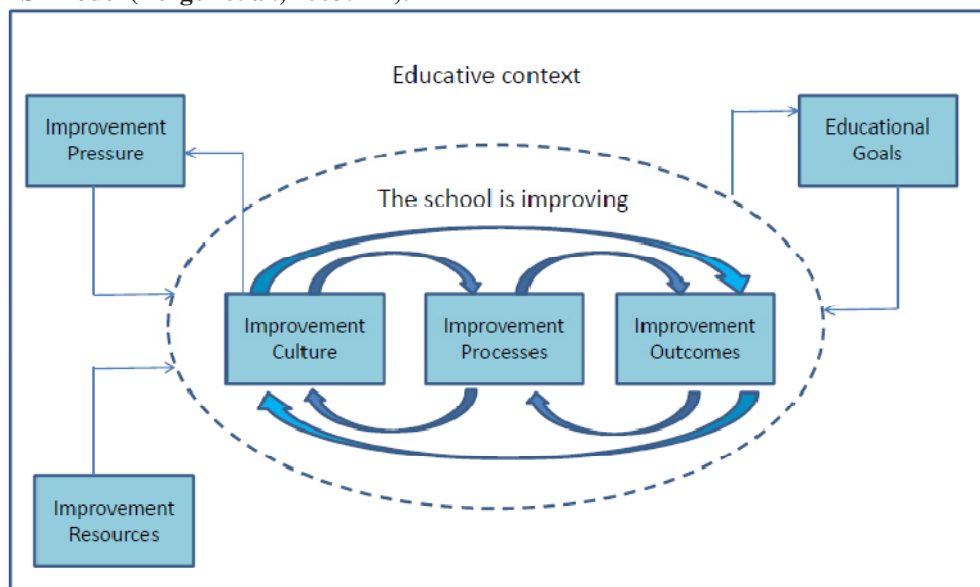
³Since the 1982y to the 1986y, ISIP aim was to improve education such as systematic and continuative effort to modify – in one or more schools – learning condition to sustain effectively educative processes (Van Velzen *et al.*, 1985).

One of the reason is that self-evaluation is a team work that involves participants in collegial processes that require adaptability, flexibility and collaboration⁴.

To avoid the assumption of “trivial recipes”, scholastic operators’ education is essential. To learn evaluative skills and to be able to use evaluative tools are (on?) “own” school (or scholastic sub-system) processes. In other terms, the use of evaluative procedures is a systematic reflection that improves positive scholastic changes.

The approach is that of effective school improvement (ESI)⁵.

Figure 1- ESI model (Berger et al., 2003:142).



The educational processes follow the action research to improve school practice (Corey, 1953). Particularly, there are four trends: diagnostic, participative, empirical and experimental (Cheinet *al.*, 1944). In that way evaluative sense-making and learning organization are promoted.

Moreover, the figure n. 2 shows unilaterally different approaches to evaluate scholastic quality (Schereens, 1994) that in reality are used mixed them in an integrated approach.

⁴A lot of schools usually use evaluative tools that require team work (placement test, level tests, questionnaires, self-analysis of results), but that are not spread. However collegial responsibility on evaluation can limit the risk of lack validity and loyalty of the evaluative procedures and the quality of tests and variables (Ghiaroni, 2009:48).

⁵ «The approach of effective schools focuses on what has to be changed to improve school performance, while the approach of schools improvement focuses on how school can change to improve» (Berger et al., 2003:141).

Figure2 - Approaches to the scholastic qualityevaluation (Castoldi, 2005)

Evaluative approaches	Theory	Aspects
Customer satisfaction: analysis of customer expectations.	Management	Valorization of customer points of view. Effects on processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of attention to learning outcomes; • focus on individual opinions.
Organizational Diagnosis: systemic analysis on organization.	Organizational Counseling	Focus on inputs and organizational processes. Availability of structured information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • little involvement of internal stakeholders; • hard consideration of the system peculiarities.
School self-analysis: ideal/real comparison.	Social Psychology	Relation between evaluation and action. Focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • significant investment of time and energy; • little credibility of the evaluative design.
Educational indicators: general draft of educational system.	StatisticalEconomy	Summary Report of the functions. Availability of data from more recipients: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • surface analysis; • limitationto the symptoms.
Educational performance evaluation: assessment of learning outcomes.	Docimology (Vertecchi, 1999)	Focus on outputs. Limited point of view and hard consideration of the long-time effects.

3. The training course of the two school networks

This paper describes the training activities about learning assessment started with some primary and secondary schools in Genoa. This experience was conducted by the PhD students attended the doctoral course in Evaluation of Educational Processes and Systems at the University of Genoa. It was an initiative of the School Board of the Liguria Province and of some Schools.

Under a special agreement, some schools have formed two networks, actually existent, one on the East, and the other on the West of Genoa.

Seventy-four teachers from kindergarten, primary and secondary schools, distributed in the both networks, participated at the project.

Figure 3 - The activities of the teacher training

Levels	Activity	Aims	Recipients
Macro level: theoreticalfram ework.	General meetings, workshops.	Introducing the potential users into the scholastic evaluation project and providing theoretical common bases.	Voluntary teachers or teacher selected by the principals of the provincial schools.
Meso Level: evaluative language.	Background analysis to organize the experimental school activities.	Sharing common evaluative language.	Teachers and principals from the school networks.
Micro Level: specificPractic es.	Experimental schoolactivities.	Improving and putting into practice evaluative knowledge and skills.	Teacher team-work within the schools of the networks.

The two school networks shared a common training program on two levels: one finalized to provide theoretical references; the second one, more specific, aimed at translating into practice the experimental project of evaluation.

The training course was built to allow teachers to have some basic elements to carry out student learning evaluation using valid objectives test items. This activity started from previous experiences of assessment tested by the training participants, as shows the figure below.

One of the crucial points is that the project provides, during the project-design, a participatory evaluation that involved stakeholders. This activity allowed identify the teacher needs. So an ex ante analysis of the teacher needs has been done with the purposes to identify the specific questions of each school and, at the same time, to share the project objectives.

Particularly, the need analysis was conducted with a qualitative approach. We have interviewed the deans of each school involved into experimental activities by a semi-structured interview. Then we did some focus group with teachers (about 10 teachers per each focus). We have also carried out a secondary analysis of the documents about the evaluation experiences on student learning already initiated by schools. The added value of this activity consisted of the possibility to micro-plan appropriately the timetable of the activities and to select the topics of teacher interest.

In addition, the teachers' involvement in the definition of educational objectives allowed them to perceive this training process not as a top-down institutional action (by the Regional School Office and/or school principal), but rather as voluntary.

Moreover the results of the teacher need analysis and the teacher feedbacks formed the start points to structure the teacher training, specific for one of each network.

Particularly, the following educational goals were collaboratively identified:

- knowing how to build structured tests of Italian language starting from eventual previously constructed test;
- being able to process, analyze and interpret the results;
- being able to disseminate the results to different stakeholders, particularly the college of teachers.

A participatory way to focus the training on the acquisition of skills to evaluate student performances on reading literacy was selected.

As a matter of fact, reading literacy is transversal and it is related with all disciplines: «one of the strategic objectives of the primary school is not only to teach the instrumentality of reading literacy, but also to enable many complex cognitive processes underlying the understanding »(Serra, 2008).

The texts that students encounter studying history, geography, science are generally expository (narrative, descriptive, argumentative). Reading to study also requires different strategies from reading (linear) to entertainment.

Evaluating student performance on reading literacy in connection with informative texts provided interesting elements that allowed the teachers modify the curricula and, in particular, develop the study skills.

The methodology was centered on the collaborative and cooperative work between experts, trainers and involved teachers. Some seminars had done to construct some reading tests. The lectures were held by a PhD student and/or by an expert on reading literacy.

The meetings were characterized by training and testing learning evaluation. Five meetings had been done, where teachers retraced the entire process from the construction to the validation of evaluation tests, with the aim of acquiring knowledge and obtaining useful tools to reuse in educational practice.

Moments of lectures about the necessary theoretical and methodological references (1st, 2nd and 4th meetings) and moments to build materials to test in classrooms and to analyze their results were alternate during the meetings.

For doing the plenary lectures interactive methodologies were adopted in order to stimulate the teacher involvement so that the socialization of knowledge and skills were simplified.

Starting from the idea that e-learning "empowers", learning processes were enriched by e-contents. Particularly, the training was accompanied by online support. It was therefore an open domain, accessible from the site of the Doctoral course, at the link "Training and testing AS 2009/2010 ". We have carried out two virtual areas, respectively for the general and the specific trainings.

We also prepared two areas reserved to each network accessible by credentials. These areas were dedicated to the publication of the documents produced during the training activities. We have also activated an interactive area that,

contrary to the areas of "network", was unique to inform each network about all the training activities and to allow the exchange of participant points of view.

The teachers were coached by experts and PhD students into the construction of tests with critical reflections and reference materials⁶.

Then the test administration was guided by methodological notes and was carried out in different ways and times in both networks. This activity encouraged the teachers and provided further inspiration for future exchange activities.

The tabulation of data was facilitated by an "ad hoc" tool built for each test useful for performance and item analyses. This tool was immediate and easy to use and was of great help for the analysis because it speeded up the reading of data.

During the last meeting the statistical indicators were showed: mean, median, mode and standard deviation to analyze student performances, and facility index, destructiveness index and selectivity index for analyze test items.

To facilitate teacher learning we also provided a bibliography on reading literacy and some evaluation guidelines on how to realize an evaluation report and how to communicate results to different stakeholders (students, professors, parents, public administration, experts).

During the training course, different monitoring and evaluation activities were done involving the social actors with interviews and meetings, in order to follow the process and modify, if necessary, the work in progress. Some formal and informal meetings and group discussions had done respectively with the teachers, the principals and the members of the provincial School Office.

The evaluation of the training effectiveness allowed the reflection on the activity planning and the design of new actions. Some teachers indicated appreciation for the opportunity to openly voice their opinions and to reflect on school evaluation. The teachers expressed hopes of increasing their knowledge about the scholastic evaluation system and tools and about the acquisition of a common evaluative language. Moreover some teachers expressed the need to find how to achieve students to the tests.

4. Discussion

The analysis of the teacher training on evaluation student performance on reading literacy, experimentally proposed to the both two networks of Genoese schools, shows some relevant aspects.

First of all, the link between school autonomy and stakeholder responsibility.

In this framework, autonomy is, according to Bottani (2002), a procedure rather than a value itself. It consists of a new organizational model of both responsibilities and decision making procedures, to whom teachers usually have never been formed or users.

From the analysis of needs but also during all the formative process, the teachers expressed the requirement to know and to be able to use accountability and formative evaluative skills. In one hand, to be able to account scholastic results in term of both learning performances and system. In the other, to be able to analyze and to interpret scholastic questions and to have problem solving capacity where it is required.

The complexity of scholastic context emerges. As the matter of fact school is a complex system that needs to leave conservative sense acquiring new and flexible organizational educative and evaluative practices to obtain success anefficacy.

Moreover, teacher education is linked to the teacher social role, their potentiality and their complex and contradictory requirements.

In this case study, the formative process is focused on the development of teacher capabilities to build objective tests for assessing student performance on reading literacy and to elaborate and to analyze the evaluative results.

Starting from the idea that teacher uses technical expertise and reflexivity (Fisher, 2002), doing an experimental action-research was fundamental to focus on participants such as teachers and students. The trainer was the "critical friend" (MacBeath, 1999) able to do the following actions:

- «having a positive point of view in front of the school and the community;
- encouraging and sustained school members;

⁶ For more information see the paper by Siri&Freddano (2011).

- helping the school to identify needs and preoccupations;
- helping different school members to assume reflexive points of view on their activities;
- encouraging idea sharing;
- motivating the school to deepen scholastic activity by empirical data and reliable tests;
- listening stakeholders showing availability and flexibility to modify own beliefs and to manage them by a constructive approach;
- not being afraid about conflicts;
- directing people to valid informative sources;
- avoiding school self-indulgence» (Berger et al., 2003:146-147).

5. Conclusion

It was possible to converge theory and practice into an unique experience. The teacher training allowed developing an evaluative culture within and between the involved schools and between school and the public administration. Particularly, participants, most of all were teachers, learnt the evaluation awareness and use.

For that reason, the added value is not only having satisfied the aims ex ante defined, such as giving to the teachers skills of learning evaluation, using objective tests but also developing transversal skills, such as the empowerment of critical evaluative thinking, overall that of external evaluation.

As a matter of fact, some authors explain perplexity on the possibility and plausibility that self-evaluation is really authentic if it is done by the same protagonists of the evaluated service/policy (Bezzi, 2009). For that reason there is the necessity to integrate self-assessment results with external evaluation, although considering the fact that they differ in aims, topics, samples, tools and so on. Particularly, external evaluation, initially perceived such as top down process, has been considered for its added value of school improvement. At the present time the training teacher is going on, focusing on the aspect of analysis and communicative skills necessary to communicate evaluative results to different stakeholders. Moreover, next time an ex post evaluation will be done to investigate the participant satisfaction and to individuate the strengths and the weaknesses perceived by the participants.

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